

Jesus' Warning Against Spiritual Hypocrisy

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Bible Text: Matthew 6:1
Preached on: Sunday, March 25, 2012

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I want to invite you to turn to the book of Matthew 6. I want to go back to a passage that I preached on several several years ago and to use that as an opportunity for us to refresh our minds about what is important, refresh our minds about where our true supreme loyalties lie and we have one loyalty to one person, we have one supreme heart loyalty to the Lord Jesus Christ. That is what it means to be a Christian and that is the theme for which we are going to devote our minds here today.

We live in an age of self-promotion. We live in an age where people put themselves forward. They put themselves forward. Companies advertise their products, athletes draw attention to their good plays with silly dances and chest bumps, entertainers have their agents, politicians put themselves forward as the answers to society's problems, women dress and have surgery in order to call attention to their appearance. Everything is directed toward me, me, me, and directing attention to ourselves. That's the spirit of the age. If you can make yourself look good either physically look good or make yourself look important, then the assumption is that you can get ahead and we have this enormous self-feeding monster of everybody trying to call attention to themselves, and if you could just please be quiet for just a little while, then I can talk about me. You know, then the important stuff will be out of the way. Just make yourself look attractive, make yourself seem important to others and that's what drives all of life. There is really no disputing that and when you think about it and step back from it, just talking about it even in purely horizontal terms, it's actually quite ugly, isn't it, that we are so fascinated with ourselves and so in love with ourselves. It's the very root and essence of sin.

Well, over against that spirit of our age, stands the sinless Son of God, stands our Lord Jesus Christ, who during his earthly life lived differently. His very character, his very nature was such that it stood out by contrast. Philippians 2:3 says that he did "nothing from selfishness or empty conceit." Jesus himself said in the Gospel of John, "I do not receive glory from men." He said in John 8:50, "I do not seek My own glory."

And as I was thinking about this, you just think about the life of the Lord Jesus Christ in a big picture sense and you see how very true that is, and once you get sickened with the self-promotion of our own hearts and of our modern society, you see how lovely the Lord Jesus Christ is by comparison. Here he is, the Son of God Incarnate on the face of the

earth, the eternal Son of God stepped into humanity, stepped into human flesh. He dwelled in obscurity for the first 30 years of his life. We know very little about the course of his life before his public ministry began, a little bit about his birth, a little bit at age 12, but in utter obscurity for 30 years, so much so that when he stepped out and began doing his public ministry, people had trouble processing it saying, "Isn't this the carpenter's son? Isn't this the son of Joseph? Where does he get all of these powers?" There was nothing that he had done to call attention to himself prior to the start of his public ministry that would have led people to that kind of expectation that, "Oh yeah, this kid is on a star track." He dwelled in obscurity for 30 years. He was not fascinated with the praise of men, indeed, he refused men who would make him King, right? They wanted to make him king and he refused that. When his disciples left him at the end of John 6, all but the 12; there were thousands following him, he began to speak difficult things to them and people left. He did not flinch. He did not run after them. He wasn't so fascinated with having a crowd around him that he needed to have their affirmation and their attention. He was undeterred by the opposition of the Pharisees. He was unflinching before Pilate when Pilate held, in a human sense, had the authority over his life or death. He did not curry favor with Pilate. After his resurrection, he rebuked multiple churches in the book of Revelation. One day he will slay his enemies. There is just a total absence of preoccupation with the praise of men. In a sense, understand his earthly life as you go through the Gospel of Luke anyway, by understanding that he set his face for Jerusalem. He knew that the call of God on his life was sending him to Jerusalem and nothing would detract him from that and the praise of men was totally a non-issue to him.

I love that about him. I love the fact that he wasn't concerned about ingratiating himself toward men and as we go to his teaching, as we go to the teaching of the Lord Jesus, we see that that's what he teaches us to be like. One of the aspects of being a Christian, one of the calls of repentance, one of the calls out of sin, is to turn away from that self-promoting, self-fascinating spirit in order to devote yourself exclusively to the glory of God. That is to be at the very heart of what it means to be a disciple of Christ. And if you look at Matthew 6, this is where we're going to go, that contrast between the spirit of self-promotion and the self-denial of a true disciple is central to understanding our passage today.

Matthew 6:1 through 6. I want to emphasize to you that what we are about to see here in this passage is of foundational determination of what your life is going to look like. This goes to the very core of what animates your life on earth and that's what we see here. This is no superficial teaching that Jesus gives. It goes to the very heart of why we exist. Matthew 6, I'm going to read two passages out of this. I'm going to read the first six verses to start and then we'll jump over to verse 16. But Matthew 6, listen to what Jesus said and we'll set the context in a moment. Jesus said,

1 Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. 2 So when you give to the poor, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be honored by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 3 But

when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4 so that your giving will be in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. 5 When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 6 But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

Now, jump over to verse 16 with me because it is a continuation of the same theme. Jesus said, verse 16,

16 Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. 17 But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face 18 so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you.

Jesus here in the middle of Matthew 6 is in the middle of what's called the Sermon on the Mount and we studied it at length several years ago, and I go back to it repeatedly because it's of such foundational significance to understanding all of what it means to be a disciple of Christ, and also it's this passage that has just been so very foundational in my own life. It's been utterly determinative having gone through and preaching through it verse by verse.

Now, the key to understanding what the Sermon on the Mount means is to go to Matthew 4:17. Go back there with me for just a moment. We've made this point multiple multiple times. Jesus had just been baptized by John in John 3, he had endured the temptation of the devil, and now he is about to embark on his public ministry and in Matthew 4:17, Matthew records a summary statement about what the message of Christ was as he went about teaching. This is an overview statement by which his teaching is to be understood. It says, "From that time Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" The theme of Jesus' teaching was repentance.

Now, as you go to the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5, 6 and 7 in the book of Matthew, what you are seeing in those three chapters is Jesus' exposition of what repentance means. That is so very important for you to understand. He says in Matthew 5:3, he says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." You see the link there, the poor in spirit have the kingdom of heaven. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Those verses link together the key to understanding what the big theme is that Jesus is teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. To be poor in spirit is to recognize that you are spiritually bankrupt before God; that you have no merit of your own that would commend you to his favor; that you have no merit of your own before his holy and majestic law. You and I have broken God's law, we have broken it irretrievably, we have broken it multiple multiple times, and we are crushed underneath the judgment

of the law of God and no one comes to Christ truly, no one becomes a Christian without making that fundamental self-assessment and that fundamental confession that, "I have no righteousness of my own. If I am to be saved, I must receive a righteousness from outside of myself or I cannot be saved." There must be repentance because the kingdom of heaven is at hand. There must be a self-renunciation, there must be a turning from sin, and there must be a fundamental submission to God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ if anyone is to be saved. No one is saved in any other manner. It is a total fallacy to think that we contribute anything of our own righteousness to earn merit before God. You have no merit before God and fundamental, at the core of a true saving response to the work of Christ on the cross is to recognize that you needed forgiveness, you needed someone else to pay the penalty, you need a righteousness outside of your own if you are to stand before God with a right relationship to his law and that is what Jesus is expounding on. At the core of a faith response to Christ is a repentance. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

Now, the question is: what does that repentance look like? What is at the core of that kind of repentance? Well, as we move into chapter 6, all of the Sermon on the Mount is an exposition of that theme, but as we move into chapter 6, what Jesus is teaching us in these passages that I just read is that true repentance fundamentally changes the motives that animate your life. True repentance fundamentally changes the motives that animate your life and understand as we were talking earlier about the spirit of our age and the self-promoting spirit of our age, there is absolutely no denying that at all, but understand that though the manifestation was different 2,000 years earlier, that same love of pride, that same love of the praise of men, was animating spiritual life in first century Israel as well. So this is a fundamental problem that transcends time and culture. Men love themselves and they love to receive praise from other men and if anyone is going to partake of the kingdom of God, if anyone is going to come to saving faith in Christ, they have to make a conscious self-determination that they are going to reject all of that, that they are going to come out of all of that to despise the praise of men for the sake of seeking the favor and the reward of God. That's what Jesus is saying here. There is a fundamental turning away from what motivates you from the praise of men to the reward of God and that's what Jesus says here in chapter 6, verse 1.

Look at it with me again. Notice that he says, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them," there is the motive, to be noticed by them, "otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven." Now, in the King James and in the New King James, the text reads "almsgiving" based on certain Greek manuscripts here. So it says, "Beware of practicing your almsgiving before men to be noticed by them." But the older and the better manuscripts here read "righteousness," and that's why the NASB has it here, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them," and that little difference is very very important because Jesus here in Matthew 6:1 is making another summary statement about the fundamental motive of spiritual life is to consciously not pursue being noticed by men in order to seek the "reward of your Father who is in heaven." And then with what I read in those subsequent passages, what he says about giving in verses 2 through 4, what he says about praying in verses 5 and 6, what he says about fasting in verses 16 through 18, those three things are all illustrations

of the more fundamental point about what is the core motivation of your heart. He's illustrating with giving, prayer and fasting, he's illustrating this overarching principle that you cannot practice righteousness for the sake of being noticed by men.

Now, there are so many fundamental profound things wrapped up into this that I almost despair of trying to expound on them. Understand here that in this passage what we're going to see is that Jesus Christ is examining your motives. He is examining the reasons for which you do things and that immediately tells us that the nature of true repentance goes beyond external conduct. It is about exchanging an old heart for a new heart. It is about rejecting an entire worldview. It is about rejecting the entire motivations that have driven your life up to the point that you come to saving faith in Christ. This love of self, this love of the praise of men must be consciously, totally, drastically rejected or you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven at all.

So this goes to the very core of what motivates us and it teaches us that why we do something is important to God. God scrutinizes that and it tells us that on the positive side, that the true Christian fulfills spiritual duty to please God, not men. And as basic as that may sound, there is no question but which we spent a lifetime trying to flesh this out and to actually honor this principle in our lives. True repentance abandons sin and self in order to orient life in submission to the God of your salvation.

Now here's what that means for you and for me. To state it maybe a little too colloquially, at the core of Christian living you eventually have to address this question: who are you trying to impress? Whose praise is it that you are trying to curry? Who is it that you are trying to get reward from? Whose praise is it that matters to you? That is what Jesus is laying out. And when he says, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them," he uses a grammatical construction that says, "This is something, this beware, this caution, is something that is to be an ongoing pattern of your life. This is to be your characteristic approach to the way that you live; that you are on guard against this ever present threat to love the praise of men. In order to do your spiritual duty so that men see it and praise you for it. This is to be an ongoing characteristic of how you guard your spiritual life." And because it is the spirit of our age, because this is a problem that transcends time and culture, you can understand why this would require our ongoing diligence in order to avoid that trap.

The Old Testament repeatedly speaks about, warning people against fearing man rather than fearing God. In fact, the Old Testament goes so far as to say that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. This is at the very core, this is at the very foundation of what it means to be a Christian. So Jesus' main point in the passage that we are looking at is that you must not live your life to seek the praise of men, and his instruction exposes what seeking the praise of men looks like and it shows us how to mortify it in our lives.

I'm going to structure this message around two main principles here this morning and the first one is this as we are studying what Jesus says here, as we try to respond and to live out true repentance in our lives, the first point is this: that you have to check your motives. You have to check your motives. Check your motives.

Now, I understand that some people are more introspective than others. I have friends that are just very deeply introspective. In fact, I have to kind of tease them to get them out of that introspective mindset because you just become so morbidly introspective about what you're doing and, "Why did I do that? Why did I say that?" and all of that, and you can go to an extreme on that. But most of us have a different problem, most of us are so superficial in our thinking that we never really truly examine ourselves. Well, here in Matthew 6:1, Jesus commands us as his disciples to make this an issue in our thinking; to make this an issue in our motivations.

Look at it with me again. We can't read it often enough. He says, chapter 6, verse 1, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men," here's the purpose of that. Why are you practicing your righteousness? He says beware of doing it with this purpose, with his goal, "to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven." Jesus says, "Watch your heart. Watch your heart lest you turn your devotion to God into a means by which you seek to earn the praise of men." When you see Jesus laying it out that clearly, you see what a despicable, ugly, black thing it is to have that motive in your heart; to pretend to be honoring God, to pretend to be obeying God with pure motives, to make that your pretense when what you're really after is for someone to notice and commend you for it.

That's what Jesus says. When he says "practicing your righteousness," he's referring to those deeds that express your devotion to Christ: the praying, the giving, the fasting. And when he says beware of doing this before men to be noticed by them, to be noticed by them, that verb there "to be noticed," it's the Greek word that we get our word "theater" from. You do it so that someone is watching. You do it as though you are on a stage and you're performing for an audience. That is exactly what he is saying. You are living your life as though you were in a theater and you had an audience watching you and you want their applause at the end of the show.

Now look, we need to be honest and realize that we are prone to that, to be noticed by men, and you can see that this is a huge issue in the mind of Christ as he is teaching here. Chapter 6, verse 1, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before men to be noticed by them." Verse 2, don't be like the hypocrites, they do this in the synagogues and in the street so that they may be honored by men. Look at verse 5, don't be like the hypocrites, they love to stand and pray so that they may be seen by men. Verse 16, when you fast, don't put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do because they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men. They do it so that they will be noticed. They do it so that they will be honored by men. They are doing it to be noticed by men around them.

Jesus is bringing front and center the motivations that animate your spiritual life and repeatedly, not once, not twice, not three times, four times in the span of 16 verses he says, "Watch out for this spiritual danger of living your life in order to be noticed by men, in order to receive the applause of men." So it's obviously a matter of supreme critical importance to Christ and he says that if you neglect this, you have no reward with your Father in heaven.

Now understand, Jesus is not criticizing the external act of giving. He is not in this passage criticizing the external act of praying or the external act of fasting. He goes on and tells us exactly how to do those things and so it's not the external act that he is after here and criticizing those external acts, what he is going at is he is going at the very core of your heart and telling you to examine yourself as to why you do these things. Why is it that you go through these motions. And as we let his words sink into us, we realize something that is glorious and also profoundly troubling. I think this is profoundly troubling what I'm about to say but it's clearly what Jesus says. Why you do something, the reason that you do something is significant to God. That's what this whole thing is about, spiritual motivations.

Why you do something is significant to God and look at what he says as he's going through this. In verse 2, he calls out these men who are doing it for the praise of men, hypocrites. Chapter 6, verse 2, hypocrites. Verse 5, when you pray you are not to be like the hypocrites. Verse 16, when you fast, don't be like the hypocrites. Don't be a hypocrite. The Greek term for "hypocrite" originally referred to stage actors, going along with that theatrical verb that we saw in verse 1. The hypocrite practices make-believe and puts on a show for his chosen audience. He wants men to congratulate him on his deeds of righteousness. He goes out of his way to make sure that someone sees. He somehow subtly calls attention, or sometimes not too subtly, calls attention to himself so that people see and say, "Wow, you're such a godly young man. Wow, you're such a godly woman." And of course, of course, the immediate response is, "No, no, no. Please don't say that," while with the other hand they are saying, "More, please." On one hand they put out the hand in order to maintain the pretense of humility and godliness, but on the other hand, "I'm sorry. I didn't hear what you said. Could you repeat that just one more time?" Internally soaking it up, internally loving the praise of men and that's why they do it. Christ sees right through that with his omniscient eye. The penetrating gaze of the Savior sees right through all of that hypocrisy.

And look, look, there is no doubt in my mind and I am sure there is no doubt in your mind either, that in a place like this, in a place like Grace Community Church, this is a constant temptation for you and me to deal with. It is just a constant temptation to maintain the appearance before men; to maintain the proper look so that people congratulate you and you fit in with everything else. Well listen, you have got to get beyond that mindset. You have got to get beyond that because do you know what? It doesn't matter what the rest of the people at Grace Community Church think about you if you're being a hypocrite. It doesn't matter. It doesn't matter if the elders commend you if at heart you're a hypocrite. So you have to look beyond even a rich spiritual environment like this and examine your heart and make sure that you are living your spiritual life to the glory of God and not to the praise of men, even the men at Grace Community Church. If you don't live that way, Jesus says you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. And the problem isn't the men and the women at Grace Community Church seeing you, the problem is at the core of your heart and your motivation that you want and love their praise and affirmation. You see that, right? You realize why that's a particular problem in an environment like this.

Well, what you have to understand is as a disciple of Christ, you have a spiritual duty on your heart imposed by Christ himself to guard against that and to take steps so that you don't live that way. You must make a conscious break from it. You have to check your motives and say, "Boy, is that speaking about me? Do I like the praise of men? Do I like, 'Oh, you're such a godly so-and-so'?" Well realize that if you find yourself drawn to that kind of praise and affirmation, Jesus is putting his finger right on the heartbeat of your life.

Now, what do you do with that? This isn't designed simply to, Jesus doesn't simply convict us, he shows us how to avoid it, how to get through that spiritual minefield without getting your leg blown off. That was a good point, wasn't it? I like that. That was Jacob. Even at that young age, you see children responding to the word of God. That's very encouraging.

Jesus said, "Check your motives." Now, how is it that you get beyond that? For some of us, that love of the praise of men is a besetting sin and it grips our hearts and we want men to notice us and if they don't, it depresses us. Well, how do you break the power of that? Well, Jesus gives it to us right here in the text of what he says. That brings us to our second point this morning. When you check your motives, you have to do a second thing as you examine your heart on this, secondly: you have to choose your reward. Choose your reward. You have to decide what it is that you want to receive as the result of your outward devotion to Christ. What is it that you want? You have to choose your reward.

Now, Jesus makes a contrast as we go through the passage here. You choose your reward on the one hand, you could choose the applause of men. The applause of men. That's a subpoint here: choose your reward, you could choose the applause of men. Look at chapter 6, verse 1, he says, "Beware of practicing your righteousness to be noticed by them; otherwise you have no reward with your Father who is in heaven." Verse 2, he says, look at the end of it, he says they sound a trumpet so that they will be seen as giving, "so that they may be honored by men." Look at the end here of verse 2, "Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full." They gave for the praise of men, they got the praise of men, they have their reward in full. The same thing in verse 5. Jesus keeps repeating himself here. The hypocrites "love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full." Verse 16, he says the same thing. Remember, he's illustrating the bigger point here. He says these hypocrites "neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full." Three times, verse 2, verse 5, verse 16, he says they have their reward in full.

They are doing these things for the goal of being noticed and honored by men and Jesus says when men honor them, uh-oh, this is where it gets bad, they have their reward in full. What does that mean "they have their reward in full"? Well, quoting from an ancient source on this, this is a technical expression, the reward in full. This is a technical expression that is regularly employed in drawing up a receipt in a business transaction. When Jesus says they have received their reward in full, it is though they had already

been given a receipt and they have absolutely no claim to further reward. It's a business transaction language. "I paid you, I paid you for what you gave me. You have your receipt. We have no further thing to do with each other. There is no further claim that I can make on you." And what Jesus says is when they have received their reward in full, he's saying this, and listen, this will shake you to the core, at least it should. It shakes me to the core when you realize that he's talking about something as subtle as motivations and why we do things and we construct this elaborate scaffolding of what our spiritual lives look like and it's all designed for men to see it, and let this frighten you. Let this teach you the fear of God, beloved. What Jesus is saying here in this is he says, "It's the praise of men that you sought, it's the praise of men that you got. The transaction is over. That is as good as it's going to get for you." All of this spiritual stuff done so that men would notice you and praise you and honor you for it, men whose breath is in their nostrils, they say, "Wow, look at you," and you soak it up, "Ah, he noticed." Jesus steps in at that very crucial moment and says that's the end of the transaction. You have no reward with God whatsoever in that.

And listen, beloved, I say this for your spiritual well-being. I say this in echo of what Christ first said. I say this as a man in need of grace himself. When you have your reward in full, when you get the stamped receipt and the men have praised you and moved on five minutes later to the next thing that occupies their mind, understand that the praise of men for your spiritual life is going to seem awfully empty when you stand before Christ and he hands out his rewards and says, "You already got yours. You were after the praise of men. They praised you. You got what you wanted. You have no claim on me." Jesus says these things to rebuke us, for sure, but he also says it to warn us so that that awful result will be avoided, so that you can avoid that.

Here's a quick check to understand what our Lord is talking about, just on a real simple basic level and his illustrations are very plain in the text that I read. Here's a question that all of us will cringe at: are your prayers more eloquent when someone else is listening? Why is that? Why is it that your eloquence is suddenly magnified when you have an audience of men as opposed to when you're on your knees before God alone? Why is that? How could you possibly explain that? "Well, I want to edify the brethren." Please. You want the brothers to praise you is why you pray better when others are listening.

Have you ever pretended to put something in the offering plate when it passes? I had a man tell me, a church leader not from here who said, "Yeah, I do that but I do it by example. People would see and they would follow and they would learn to give." Well, no. No, you do that so that men will think that you are putting it in the plate. You do it so that men will notice. That's what you're saying. If you're not going to put anything in the offering plate, fine. Don't. Don't. You know, we'll meet budget one way or another but don't compound, don't engage in sin that Jesus specifically warns you against by pretending to be somebody that you're not. Just stop it. Stop the hypocrisy. We serve a great and magnificent Lord. We serve a glorious Christ and he should be served with sincerity of heart that's worthy of his humble earthly life, and we shouldn't use pretended devotion to him so that we get praise from men. "You're so godly. You're so faithful."

Oh, please. Please, don't live that way. Guard your heart, Jesus says. Be on guard against this and calculate life so that you won't live that way.

There is a different reward to seek and this is gloriously liberating. As convicting as everything else has been up to this point, what comes here now in what Jesus teaches is so greatly profoundly encouraging, it is so liberating, it is so life transforming that it will slowly loosen your fear of men and give you a sense of, a proper sense of spiritual independence and confidence to live righteously whether men notice or not. There is a different reward to seek. We've said choose your reward and we've said you could choose the applause of men but Jesus says that's a dead end, right? You all see that's a dead end. There is a different reward to seek and, secondly, what Jesus says is: to seek the approval of God. Seek the approval of God and here Jesus pulls back the curtain, pulls back a veil, and you see the great faithfulness of God to his humble disciples in a way that can only make you love him more and just completely change your motivations and orientations so that you see through the praise of men for what it is, you turn your back on that so that you can live in a quiet pursuit of the glory of God.

Look at what Jesus says here in chapter 6, verse 4. I love this so very much. Jesus says in verse 3, "when you give to the poor, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving will be in secret," no one is going to see it, "and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you." What reward do you want? Do you want the praise of men or do you want the reward from your Father? Hide your giving, as it were, so that men won't see it and when you're doing that, you are mortifying that sinful desire for the praise of men. If you make it so that they can't see you, then they can't praise you for it. That mortifies that desire and then you open yourself up to the blessing of God. Our omniscient God sees that and says, "Ah," as it were, he says, "I see what he's doing. I like that and I'm going to reward that."

Jesus says is again in verse 6, "when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door and pray to your Father who is in secret," get someplace where no one can see you praying. Do that, he says, and what is the outcome of that? What's the reward of that? "Your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you."

The same thing in verse 18. Look at verse 17, "when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face," don't look gloomy. If you are weighed down and that's why you're fasting, don't put on that appearance before men, "wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you."

Understand, believe and trust that you serve a loving, gracious, heavenly Father who understands the motives of your heart and as you withdraw these things from the notice of men for the sake of pleasing him and being alone in intimacy with him, understand that God is not indifferent to that. In some manner in the outworking of his providence in this life and in the eternal rewards that he gives us in the life to come, he will reward you and honor you for living that way. And all of a sudden private prayer becomes a matter of a consciousness of, "Wow, God is going to reward me for this." Out of the fruit of true

repentance you stop doing spiritual deeds to be noticed by men and whether men notice or not is so secondary that it does not affect your joy in it.

Now, you may not realize it, that's part of my responsibility as the teacher here this morning, but there is such great encouragement for you in this principle. For those of you that are faithful believers and have been overlooked, the opportunities for service just haven't been there as you have chosen not to promote yourself and men have neglected and missed it, God hasn't missed it. God sees your faithfulness. For that stay-at-home mom consumed with the routine duties of keeping house out of a sense of faithfulness that says, "These children are a stewardship from God and I need to be faithful to this," you're wiping stuff off your blouse day after day after day after day and no one seems to notice, understand that here is your motivation. Here is your encouragement in that. That lonely widow confined at home wondering why you're still here, what's the point of this? For the man who has lost his job and the status that used to go with it but is trying to live a godly life all the same, look to this passage. See the character of your God and find your encouragement. Find the profound encouragement that is embedded in this. Our heavenly Father sees our faithfulness even when men do not and our heavenly Father says by his own character that, "I will reward that faithfulness." Your faithfulness in those day-to-day mundane opportunities, your faithfulness in those mundane seemingly unnoticed spiritual disciplines, Jesus says God sees that and stores up a reward for you that he will give without fail.

And when you start to understand that, when that starts to sink in, all of a sudden you find yourself increasingly drawn to a desire for intimacy with God and you really don't even want men to intrude upon it in the first place because there is something so sacred and holy and precious about it, something so sacred and holy and precious about being faithful when no one notices and you're conscious of the fact, "God, you see this. God, I'm trusting your word that you're going to honor this. I'm trusting you for an undeserved reward that you say you'll give to those who love Christ and live this way." All of a sudden, all of a sudden the preciousness of walking alone with God transcends in value anything that this world could ever say to you and the approval of God, the favor of God, the smile of God, as it were, on your life is more precious than all the jewels in the world. All the gold and silver and all of the accolades and honors and plaques from men is dung by comparison to the purity and the glory of that kind of intimacy with Christ. And if men don't notice, men don't notice. That actually makes it easier.

So you see, beloved, we're not talking about external conduct here, we're talking about a total transformation of your heart and purified motives for the things that you do. And the ingredients to live out this kind of repentance are so simple. It is so simple that a child can understand them. At the core, it's this simple, "Father, I believe your word. I read what Jesus says here and I believe it. I accept it at face value. I know it to be true. Father, I fear you. I fear the consequences of disregarding Jesus' teaching on this. I am afraid of living my life for the praise of men and squandering the spiritual opportunity I have for reward from you. I'm afraid of that. I know that I'm sinful. I know that I'm prone to that and I fear how seriously you take this. I fear you. I believe your word and I fear you. I don't want to be like that. O God, I do not want to be like that. Father, I trust you. You

say, Christ said here, you see in secret and you will reward me. He said it not once, he said it not twice, he said it three times. This is absolute truth upon absolute truth upon absolute truth. I trust you for that. I trust you so much that I will orient my life around the certainty that you will bless me as I honor your word, even as I'm honoring you in the unseen depths of my heart. Even when men don't see, Father, you will see the purity of my loyalty, the purity of my faithfulness, the purity of my desire to be exclusively devoted to your glory to the disregard of the praise of men. I trust you to see that and to honor your word when you say you will reward that and if I don't see it in this life, anything to do with it in this life, Lord, I don't care. I'll be happy to see how you are faithful at the judgment seat of Christ." And all of a sudden your whole perspective on why you do what you do in spiritual life is totally and radically changed forever.

There is contentment for your soul even if the world is passing you by and as you move from the applause of men to the approval of your heavenly Father as the deepest motivation of your heart, God sees it. God will reward you and our heavenly Father, our Lord Jesus Christ, will never be unfaithful. He will never deny his word. He will always be true to you. The reward for this kind of life is certain and it is worthy of pursuit even if the world passes you by. That is a measure of the glory of Christ and how worthy he is of your deepest most exclusive heart devotion.

Let's pray to him.

Father, our hearts are so deceitful, our hearts are so mixed sometimes that it's hard to sort all of this out. We can't even read our own motives sometimes, Father. That's how desperately in need of your grace we are. But in response to your word here this morning, Father, we just in principle embrace what Christ said here. We reject the praise of men as being the motivating factor in our lives, whether it's the praise of men on the street or whether it's the praise of men within the walls of the church, Father. That is not why we do what we do. We do what we do so that you would see us, so that you would be pleased, so that you would be honored. And even if men never congratulate us, Father, we don't care. I mean, we really really do not care about that. What we want, Father, is this promised reward that Jesus speaks of that comes from a faithful heavenly Father who says he sees in secret and he will reward you, he sees in secret and he will reward you, he sees in secret and he will reward you. Father, we believe your word. We fear the consequences of disregarding this and we trust you to honor your word to us and so we give our lives as a sacrifice of praise to you even in the unseen depths of our hearts, O God, and we ask you to be faithful to us. Father, we pray that those who have not come to know Christ would turn from sin, turn from their love of self, their love of the praise of men, and repent and put their faith in Christ. And for those of us that do know you, O God, we pray that you would help us live out this manner of life that is worthy of your great and holy name. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.